

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY NAIROBI IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY COTONOU IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY LAGOS

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 131539

NAIROBI FOR DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARROP

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CASC, DM

SUBJECT:VISIT OF DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARROP TO
COTONOU

REF: A) LAGOS 6197, B) COTONOU 734, C) STATE 125809,
D) STATE 127134, E) COTONOU 745

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1. PART I OF BRIEFING FOR YOUR VISIT TO COTONOU FOLLOWS.

2. PURPOSE

PRIMARY - TO EXPRESS OUR SERIOUS CONCERN ABOUT THE CONTINUED
DETENTION OF LEONARD BENNETT AND HIS DETERIORATING HEALTH.
(BENNETT CASE BRIEFING TO BE SENT SEPTTEL.)

SECONDARY - TO REITERATE OUR DESIRE FOR CORDIAL RELATIONS
WITH BENIN AND DISCUSS OTHER ISSUES.

3. BACKGROUND

4. SINCE ITS INDEPENDENCE FROM FRANCE IN 1960 DAHOMEY/BENIN HAS SUFFERED FROM POLITICAL INSTABILITY INCLUDING NUMEROUS BLOODLESS COUPS D'ETAT. IN OCTOBER 1972, IN AN EFFORT TO

BRING STABILITY TO THE FACTION TORN COUNTRY, A GROUP OF MIDDLE GRADE MILITARY OFFICERS, LED BY LT. COL. MATHIEU KEREKOU, SEIZED POWER AND SET UP A MILITARY REGIME. SINCE THEN, THE KEREKOU REGIME, THE LONGEST TO HOLD POWER IN BENIN'S POST INDEPENDENCE HISTORY, OFFICIALLY ADOPTED THE PRINCIPLES OF "SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM" AND MARXISM-LENINISM AS ITS GUIDING PHILOSOPHY (1974) AND CHANGED THE COUNTRY'S NAME TO BENIN (1975). THE SOVIET UNION, NORTH KOREA AND CUBA HAVE PRE-EMPTED FRANCE'S PRIMACY AS THE PRINCIPAL EXTERNAL POLITICAL INFLUENCE THOUGH BENIN STILL RELIES ON FRANCE AND OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES FOR ECONOMIC SUPPORT. IN INTERNATIONAL GATHERINGS BENIN HAS UPHELD THE MOST RADICAL OF THIRD WORLD POSITIONS AND CAN BE COUNTED ON TO SUPPORT SOVIET AND NORTH KOREAN POSITIONS ON KEY INTERNATIONAL ISSUES. A MAJOR COMPLICATING FACTOR IN BENIN'S INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT WAS AN ABORTIVE MERCENARY ATTACK ON CONFIDENTIAL

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JANUARY 16, 1977. THE ATTACK, ALLEGEDLY ORGANIZED BY DAHOMEAN DISSIDENTS ABROAD, PROVIDED THE GPRB WITH A RATIONALE FOR CREATING A STATE OF EMERGENCY ENABLING IT TO CARRY OUT ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND TAKE OTHER MEASURES IN THE NAME OF PROTECTING THE REVOLUTION. MANY OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS ARE STILL INFLUENCED BY A "MERCENARY PSYCHOSIS" WHICH CONTINUES TO SPAWN FEARS THAT BENIN WILL SOON BE ATTACKED BY OUTSIDE FORCES.

5. MAJOR U.S. INTERESTS

6. THE UNITED STATES HAS NO MAJOR POLITICAL, STRATEGIC OR ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN BENIN. OUR RELATIONS WITH BENIN HAVE DETERIORATED AS BENIN'S MARXIST-LENINIST ORIENTATION HAS STRENGTHENED. WE HAVE NOT HAD AN AMBASSADOR IN BENIN SINCE FEBRUARY 1976 WHEN OUR AMBASSADOR WAS RECALLED AT HIS REQUEST BECAUSE BENINESE FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS QUESTIONED HIS ATTITUDE TOWARDS BENIN AND ASKED HIM TO SIGN A STATEMENT ON THIS SUBJECT. WE HAVE NO INTENTION OF SENDING A NEW AMBASSADOR FOR THE FORSEEABLE FUTURE. WITHIN A FEW MONTHS AFTER BENIN'S TERM ON THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL TERMINATED ON DECEMBER 31, 1977 THE BENINESE AMBASSADOR TO THE UN THOMAS BOYA RETURNED TO BENIN. THERE HAS BEEN NO WORD AS TO WHEN HE WILL RETURN OR IF SOMEONE WILL REPLACE HIM.

7. OUR PRIMARY INTEREST IN BENIN IS HUMANITARIAN. OUR

MODEST ASSISTANCE IS DIRECTED TOWARDS HEALTH AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH LIMITED BILATERAL PROGRAMS AND REGIONAL PROGRAMS. THE ONE MAJOR INFRA-STRUCTURE TYPE PROJECT WE ARE INVOLVED IN, THE DOLS 11 MILLION AID FUNDED COTONOU BRIDGE DAM LOAN, STEMS FROM AN AGREEMENT ARRIVED AT SEVERAL YEARS AGO WHICH ONLY NOW IS BEING IMPLEMENTED.

THE REGIONAL ONCHOCERCIASIS (RIVER BLINDNESS) CONTROL PROJECT FOR FY'78 INVOLVES SOME DOLS 845 THOUSAND. A
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DOLS 4 MILLION RURAL WATER SUPPLY PROJECT IS PLANNED FOR FY'79. DESPITE OUR IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES THE GPRB CONTINUES TO SEND PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN OUR EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING PROGRAMS. LOANS AND GRANTS WHICH AID FUNDS THROUGH THE ENTENTE FUND INCLUDE PROJECTS FOR SMALL AFRICAN BUSINESSES, LIVESTOCK AND FOOD PRODUCTION WHICH ARE IN VARIOUS STAGES OF IMPLEMENTATION AND MAY INVOLVE DOLS 4 TO 7 MILLION. A MAJOR COMPONENT OF OUR ASSISTANCE TO BENIN HAS BEEN THE PEACE CORPS BUT, BECAUSE OF THE REGIME'S ERRATIC SUPPORT FOR THE PROGRAM AND INCREASING SUSPICION OF WESTERNERS, THE NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS HAS BEEN ALLOWED TO DECLINE THROUGH NORMAL ATTRITION FROM ABOUT FIFTY TO ROUGHLY TWENTY. A FUTURE PROGRAM LEVEL OF ABOUT 30 IS UNDER CONSIDERATION BUT PROSPECTS ARE UNCERTAIN.

8. JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES - EXPROPRIATION: WE HAVE REPEATEDLY PRESSED THE GPRB TO TAKE STEPS TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE COMPENSATION TO THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES (WATCHTOWER SOCIETY INCORPORATED IN PENNSYLVANIA) FOR PROPERTY CONFISCATED IN APRIL 1976 WHEN THE WITNESSES WERE BANNED IN BENIN FOR POLITICAL REASONS. THE BENINESE RECENTLY AGREED TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE WITNESSES. THE WITNESSES HAVE CHOSEN AS THEIR NEGOTIATING REPRESENTATIVE A CANADIAN CITIZEN, CARL PROSSER, WHO WAS AMONG THE EXPATRIATE WITNESSES EXPELLED FROM BENIN IN 1976. HE HAS EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT HE MIGHT BE DETAINED IF HE RETURNS TO BENIN AND HAS REQUESTED ASSURANCES OF SAFE CONDUCT IN WRITING AND AN ESCORT. WE HAVE ASKED OUR EMBASSY IN COTONOU TO ASSIST PROSSER IN OBTAINING ASSURANCES OF SAFE CONDUCT FROM THE GPRB AND HAVE SUGGESTED THAT HE NOT PROCEED TO COTONOU UNTIL SUCH ASSURANCES CAN BE ARRANGED.

YOUR TALKING POINTS-- (EMBASSY COTONOU MAY WISH TO UPDATE)
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-- WE ARE PLEASED TO HEAR THAT YOUR GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES THEIR CLAIMS FOR REIMBURSEMENT OF PROPERTY EXPROPRIATED IN 1976.

-- WE HOPE THAT YOUR GOVERNMENT CAN TAKE THE NECESSARY MEASURES TO ASSURE SAFE CONDUCT FOR THE REPRESENTATIVES OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES SO THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS CAN BEGIN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

9. PEACE CORPS - OUR LEVEL OF PEACE CORPS PERSONNEL IN BENIN IS NOW DOWN TO ROUGHLY TWENTY AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE REDUCED THROUGH NORMAL ATTRITION UNTIL THE GPRB REQUESTS NEW VOLUNTEERS. WE WISH TO CONTINUE THE PROGRAM

- - - - -
YO ALKING POINTS (EMBASSY COTONOU MAY WISH TO UPDATE)

-- WE BELIEVE THAT THE PEACE CORPS HAS PLAYED A CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE IN BENIN'S DEVELOPMENT AND ARE PREPARED TO CONTINUE THE PROGRAM TO HELP IN MEETING BASIC HUMAN NEEDS.

10. HUMAN RIGHTS - SINCE BENNETT CASE AND JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES CLAIMS WILL BE ADDRESSED ON THIS VISIT AF AND HA CONCUR THAT IT WOULD NOT REPEAT NOT BE ADVISABLE TO RAISE WIDER HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES.

11. TRAVEL ADVISORY - THE OFFICE OF THE LEGAL ADVISOR BELIEVES THAT TO THREATEN A TRAVEL ADVISORY IN BENNETT'S CASE (OR OTHER DETENTION CASES) WOULD BE AWKWARD AND CREATE AN UNDESIRABLE PRECEDENT. WE BELIEVE IT ADVISABLE NOT TO RENEW YOUR REQUEST TO AMBASSADOR BOYA LAST NOVEMBER THAT THE GPRB CONVEY IN WRITING TO OUR EMBASSY IN COTONOU HIS VERBAL ASSURANCES REGARDING NO FURTHER ARBITRARY DETENTION OF U.S. CONFIDENTIAL

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CITIZENS. WE BELIEVE THAT THE FEW UNSUSPECTING TOURISTS OR BUSINESSMEN WHO MIGHT VISIT BENIN ARE COVERED BY A WARNING CABLE WE SENT TO NEIGHBORING AND EN ROUTE POSTS LAST APRIL WHICH WAS FOLLOWED BY A REMINDER THIS JANUARY. NEITHER OF THE DETENTIONS WE ARE AWARE OF SINCE AUGUST INVOLVED UNSUSPECTING TOURISTS.

12. TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS - BOYA TOLD YOU LAST NOVEMBER THAT U.S. DIPLOMATS COULD TRAVEL WHERE THEY WISHED IN BENIN WITH THE ONLY REQUIREMENT THAT THEY NOTIFY THE AUTHORITIES IN ADVANCE. WE HAVE AGREED TO EMBASSY COTONOU'S RECOMMENDATION THAT THEY INTERPRET THE BENINESE TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS AS A REQUIREMENT FOR PRIOR NOTICE EVEN THOUGH THE ACTUAL WORDING OF THE RESTRICTIONS INDICATES THAT PRIOR AUTHORIZATION BY THE BENINESE AUTHORITIES IS NECESSARY. WE ARE AWARE OF NO PROBLEMS AS A RESULT OF THIS APPROACH. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO RAISE THIS

ISSUE.

13. U.S. AMBASSADOR - THE BENINESE GOVERNMENT HAS REGULARLY INQUIRED AS TO WHEN WE WILL SEND A NEW AMBASSADOR.

YOUR TALKING POINTS (ONLY IF ASKED)

-- RESPOND THAT THE ADMINISTRATION IS REVIEWING ITS

REPRESENTATION ABROAD AND HAS NOT MADE A DECISION REGARDING THE ASSIGNMENT OF AN AMBASSADOR TO BENIN.

14. REPARATIONS FOR JANUARY 16 MERCENARY INVASION - THE BENINESE MAY WISH TO FOLLOW UP ON THEIR PREVIOUS CLAIMS
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THAT BENIN IS DUE REPARATIONS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR THE JANUARY 16, 1977 MERCENARY INVASION OR THEY MAY ASK FOR REPARATIONS IN THE FORM OF INCREASED U.S. AID LEVELS. LAST SPRING IN THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL BENIN, A MEMBER AT THAT TIME, RAISED THE ISSUE OF THE MERCENARY RAID AND REPARATIONS. THE ACRIMONIOUS SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE ENDED APRIL 15 WITH THE ADOPTION BY CONSENSUS OF A COMPROMISE AFRICAN DRAFT RESOLUTION WHICH SET ASIDE BENIN'S DEMANDS FOR INTERNATIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DAMAGES SUFFERED. THE MAJOR PARTS OF THE RESOLUTION CONDEMNED THE ARMED AGGRESSION AGAINST BENIN, CALLED UPON ALL STATES TO PROHIBIT RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND TRANSIT OF MERCENARIES AND APPEALED FOR ASSISTANCE TO HELP BENIN REPAIR THE DAMAGES CAUSED BY THE RAID. THE RESOLUTION CLEARLY LEAVES THE OPTION OF CONTRIBUTING TO BENIN UP TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF MEMBER STATES. WE SUPPORTED THE RESOLUTION FULLY AWARE OF THE DANGEROUS PRECEDENT WHICH COULD BE SET IF THE SECURITY COUNCIL WERE TO REQUIRE INTERNATIONAL COMPENSATION FOR BENIN. IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR THE UNSYG CIRCULATED A NOTE PERTAINING TO PREVIOUS UNSC RESOLUTIONS WHICH APPEALED TO MEMBER STATES AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO ASSIST BENIN TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE FROM THE MERCENARY ATTACK. ANNEXES TO THE NOTE CONTAINED SUGGESTED AID PROJECTS. WE DO NOT INTEND TO PROVIDE REPARATIONS ASSISTANCE TO BENIN.

YOUR TALKING POINTS (ONLY IF ASKED)

-- THE CRITERIA FOR OUR ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN PRESCRIBED BY OUR CONGRESS. IT DIRECTS THAT OUR AID SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON HELPING THE POOREST ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY. WE CANNOT TIE IT TO AN INCIDENT SUCH AS THE JANUARY 16 INVASION, WHICH HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH U.S. ASSISTANCE.

-- WE HOPE THAT BENIN, THROUGH THE DETERMINED EFFORTS
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OF THE BENINESE PEOPLE, AND SUCH INTERNATIONAL
ASSISTANCE AS MAY BE FORTHCOMING, WILL BE ENABLE TO
REPAIR ANY DAMAGES STEMMING FROM THE ATTACK OF JANUARY
16.

-- (ONLY IF SPECIFICALLY ASKED) WE SEE NO JUSTIFICATION
FOR THE PAYMENT OF "REPARATIONS" BY THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY TO BENIN AS A RESULT OF THE JANUARY 16 INCIDENT.

-- (ONLY IF SPECIFICALLY ASKED) WE CANNOT PROVIDE
ASSISTANCE TO BENIN FOR REPARATIONS AS REQUESTED IN
UNSYG'S NOTE OF FEBRUARY 16 TO WHICH WERE ATTACHED
SEVERAL ANNEXES LISTING SUGGESTED AID PROJECTS. WE
HAVE NO OBJECTION TO CONSIDERING THE ASSISTANCE
PROJECTS LISTED OR OTHERS THAT BENIN MAY PROPOSE ON
THEIR MERITS, UNDER USUAL AID PLANNING PROCEDURES AND
WITHOUT REFERENCE TO REPARATIONS.

15. CHANCERY AND RESIDENCE - THE BENINESE MAY RAISE
THEIR CONTINUED EFFORTS TO INSPECT OUR CHANCERY. WE
BELIEVE THEIR EFFORTS TO INSPECT THE CHANCERY ARE PART
OF THEIR PLAN TO TAKE OVER U.S. AND OTHER DIPLOMATIC
PROPERTIES. THIS ISSUE WAS THE SUBJECT OF HIGH LEVEL
DISCUSSIONS IN THE SPRING OF 1976. IN AN EXCHANGE OF
NOTES WITH THE GPRB IN JUNE 1976, WE AGREED THAT IF
THE GPRB MADE AVAILABLE SUITABLE PLOTS OF LAND AND IF
THE CONGRESS APPROVED FUNDING FOR A NEW CHANCERY AND
RESIDENCE IN COTONOU TO BE INCLUDED IN THE FY'80-'81
BUDGET REQUEST, CONSTRUCTION COULD BEGIN BY 1981.

YOUR TALKING POINTS - ONLY IF ASKED

-- WE CANNOT ACCEDE IN YOUR REQUEST TO INSPECT OUR
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CHANCERY BECAUSE THE BUILDING PLANS AND PROPERTY
VALUE IS INFORMATION WHICH SHOULD BE OBTAINED FROM THE
LANDLORD.

-- AN INSPECTION OF OUR CHANCERY WOULD BE IN CONTRA-
VIENNA CONVENTION ON DIPLOMATIC
RELATIONS.

-- WE CONTINUE TO ADHERE TO THE SUBSTANCE OF THE NOTES
EXCHANGED WITH YOUR GOVERNMENT IN JUNE 1976 WITH
REGARD TO DIPLOMATIC PROPERTIES.

CHRISTOPHER

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